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## Russians Vote With Their Feet

According to the latest public opinion polls, many Americans are so disenchanted with the likely Democratic and Republican candidates for president that they'd welcome a chance to vote for "None of the Above" this November. Indeed, this disgruntlement among the electorate is the main thing independent John Anderson has going for him.

In the Soviet Union, the so-called electoral process leaves the voters no choice when they file into the polling booths to "elect" the only candidates on the ballot.

And yet, according to America's Kremlin-watchers, disenchanted Russians still manage to "vote with their feet" by staying home on Election Day. This has also been confirmed by a Soviet defector who was once a high official of the Politburo.

The defector, who used to be a Communist Party supervisor for several election districts, told my associates Vicki Warren and Dale Van Atta how widespread the practice was. "In all the districts that I supervised, as well as in districts where the real results were known to me," he said, "between 15 or 20 percent of the voters declared their unwillingness to vote."

How many actually persist in their intention to boycott the spurious election process is not known. First of all, it's against the law for Soviet citizens to abstain from voting. Communist Party activists are saddled with the job of getting people to the polls for the formal endorsement of party candidates.

The Soviet party hacks have lists of all voters in their districts, and check off each one as the vote is cast. Those who don't show up are visited during the day.

Despite this heavyhanded charade, our

Soviet sources estimate that more than 60 million voters—about a third of the adult population—refused to vote for the official Communist Party candidate in elections of the mid-1970s. This was, the sources said, a way of expressing opposition to the government.

There could be other reasons, though. Soviet elections are held on Sundays, and a lot of Russians use their day off to get drunk, according to a State Department source.

The true numbers of Soviet citizens who vote or don't vote never reach the bigshots in the Kremlin. Party bureaucrats, fearful of losing their jobs, "systematically falsify" the figures on voter turnout, according to our sources.

Not long ago, one Kremlin official had the temerity to suggest that more than one candidate be offered to the "voters." Later, a non-communist social organization quietly fielded a candidate for the Soviet Parliament. Just as quietly, he was forced to drop out.